

INDIGENOUS SUPPORT WORKER PROJECT
JULY 2026

"WE KNOW HOW TO TAKE CARE OF EACH OTHER"

A ZINE ABOUT PEER WORK,
SURVIVAL, AND SOLIDARITY



WE LIVE IN A BROKEN SYSTEM

Admiral Jack

People think that homelessness and addiction are just a series of bad choices. They might say, “those people don’t really want help.”

But those who live on the streets understand the gaps in services better than anyone.

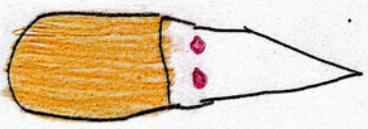
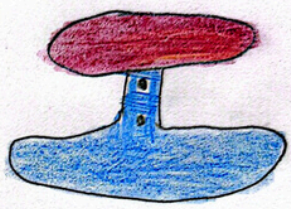
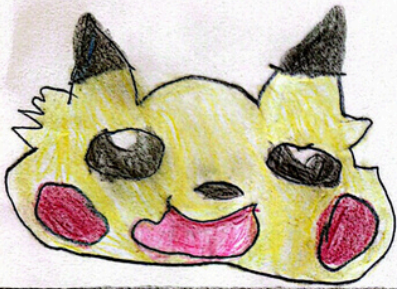
This guide is not intended to tell you how to survive. You already know!

WHAT IS A PEER?

A peer is someone you hang out with who shares similar experiences with you. Each peer has their own unique history of addiction, mental health problems, or homelessness.

A professional's knowledge comes from their training and career, but a **peer's knowledge comes from their own experiences.**





VAIKA.NOVALINGA

Ideally, both peers and professionals are paid for their work.

The difference is that peers are often doing this work without being paid, and have been doing this work long before they started calling themselves a “peer.”

PEER VOICES MATTER

For so long unhoused voices have been ignored. Peer knowledge is often overlooked in favor of professional experience, or it is exploited to make others “look good.”

We are not numbers or textbook stories – we are the experts.



RESPECT EVERYONE'S JOURNEY

Not everyone wants or is ready for treatment or change. You never know what someone has been through and healing looks different for everyone, so meet people where they are without judgement.

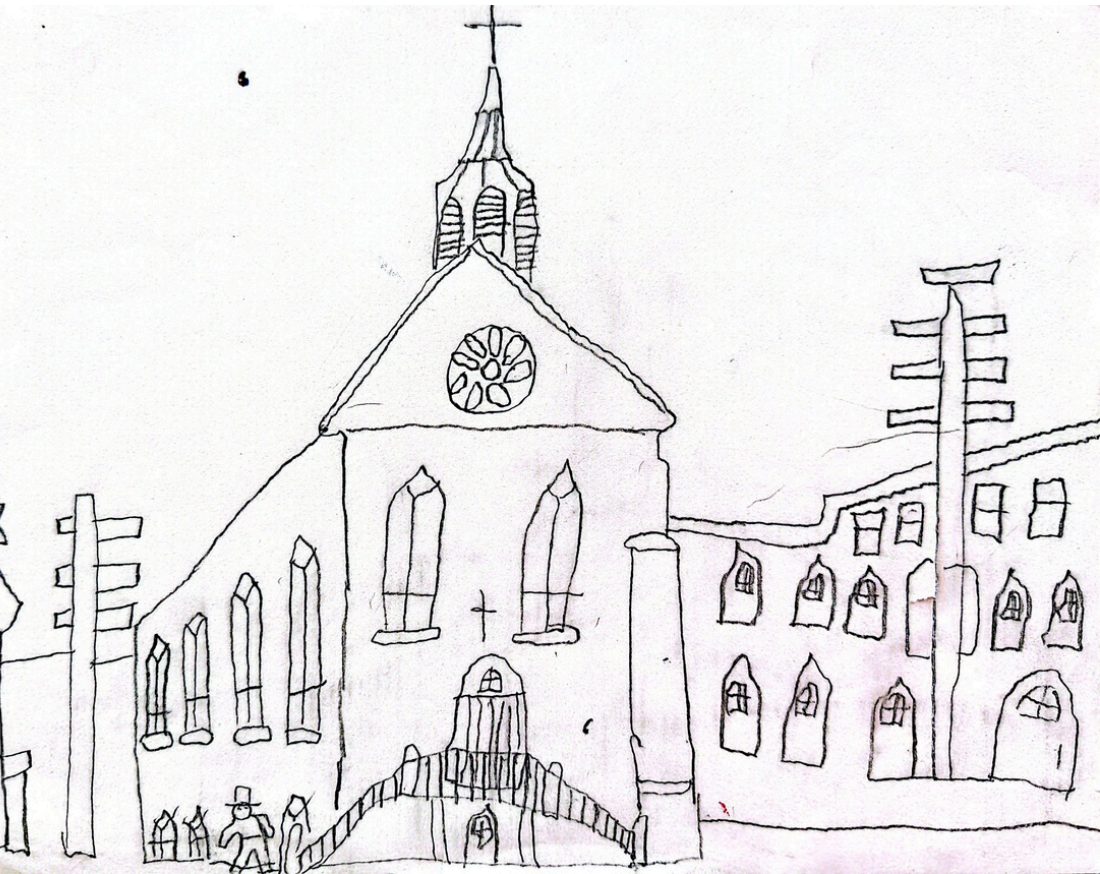
WHY PEER WORK FEELS RIGHT

We believe that everyone deserves community no matter their sobriety, income, or mental health.

We believe that people should have the freedom to choose for themselves, even if that choice sometimes hurts them.

We believe that everyone has something to contribute.

Be patient and let people come to you when they are ready – not everyone will be able to ask for help.





MORE THAN JUST A TOKEN

You might be asked one day to share your story as a peer.

Remember: *Not every invitation is about empowerment.* Some people want your story or your name, but not your opinion or feedback. **It is always your choice to participate or not.**



Answer these questions if you are unsure about agreeing to an invitation:

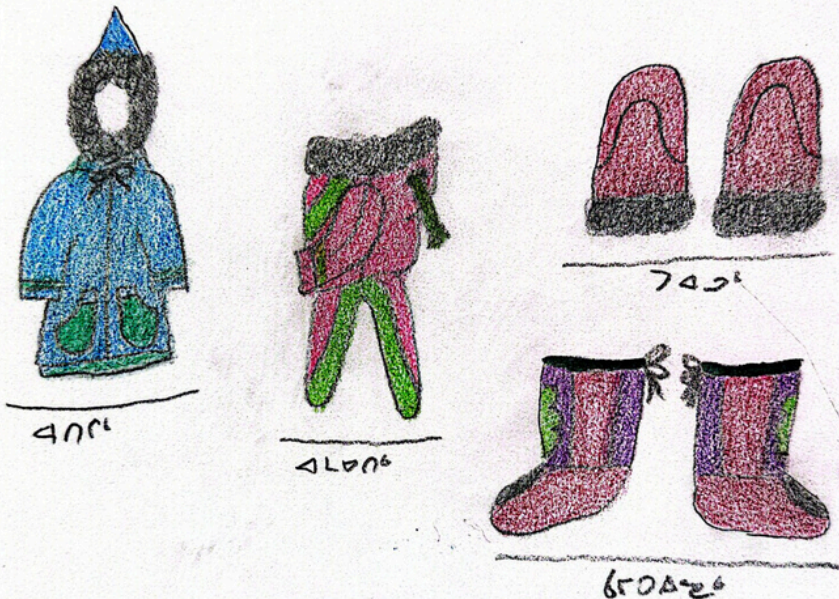
- Why am I being invited?
- Am I helping make decisions?
- Who is listening?
- Does this benefit my community?
- What happens after I share?
- Am I supported before and after?
- Am I being fairly compensated?

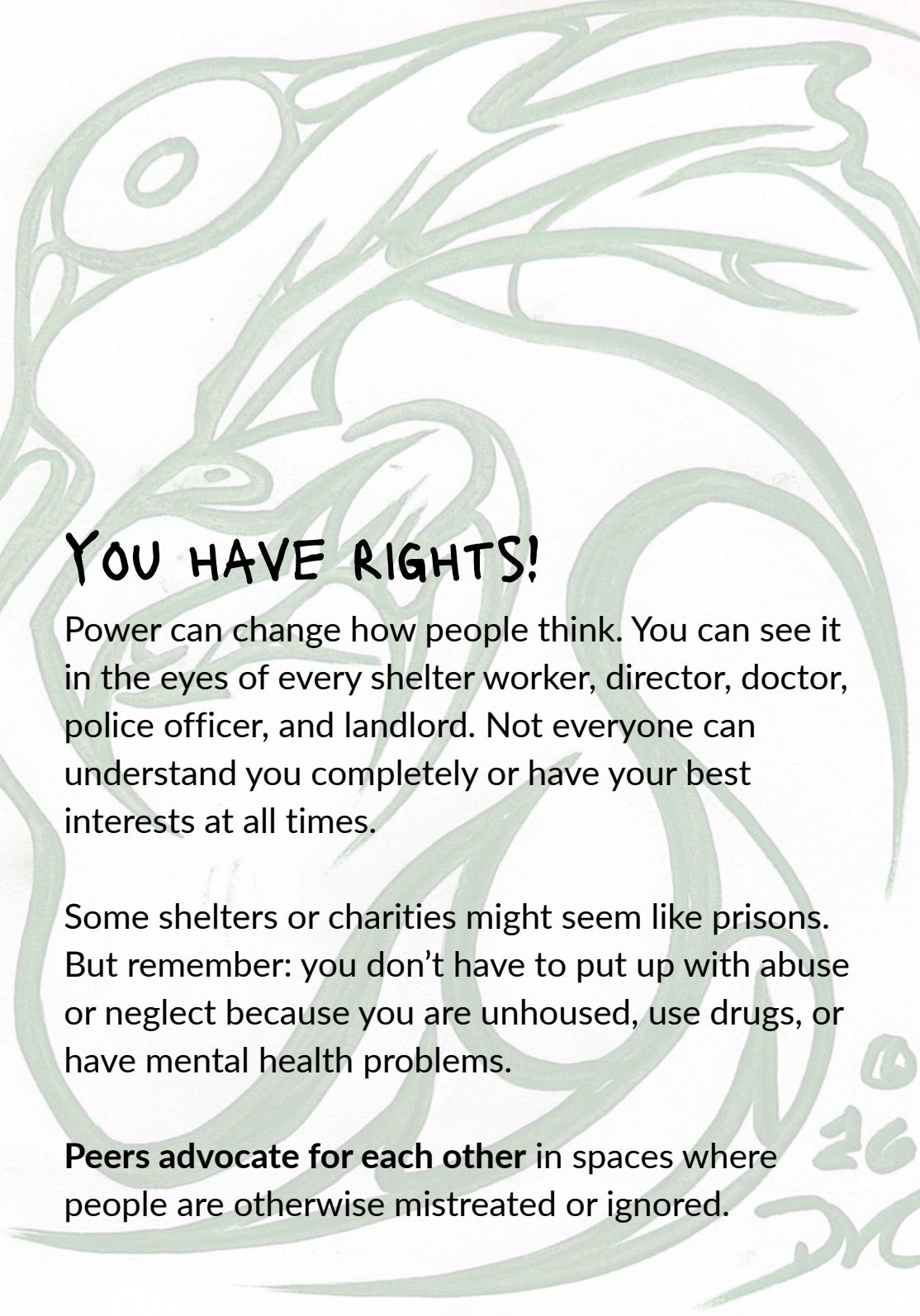
CAN PEOPLE WALK ON THEIR OWN?

Peer work is *fundamentally different* from shelter work or charity work.

It assumes the worth and capacity of every individual as inherent. It relies on a “horizontal” power structure in which everyone takes care of everyone else in the ways that they best know how.

In this manner of working, people are not just “problems” to solve or manage, but capable individuals with their own talents, skills, and wisdom to share.



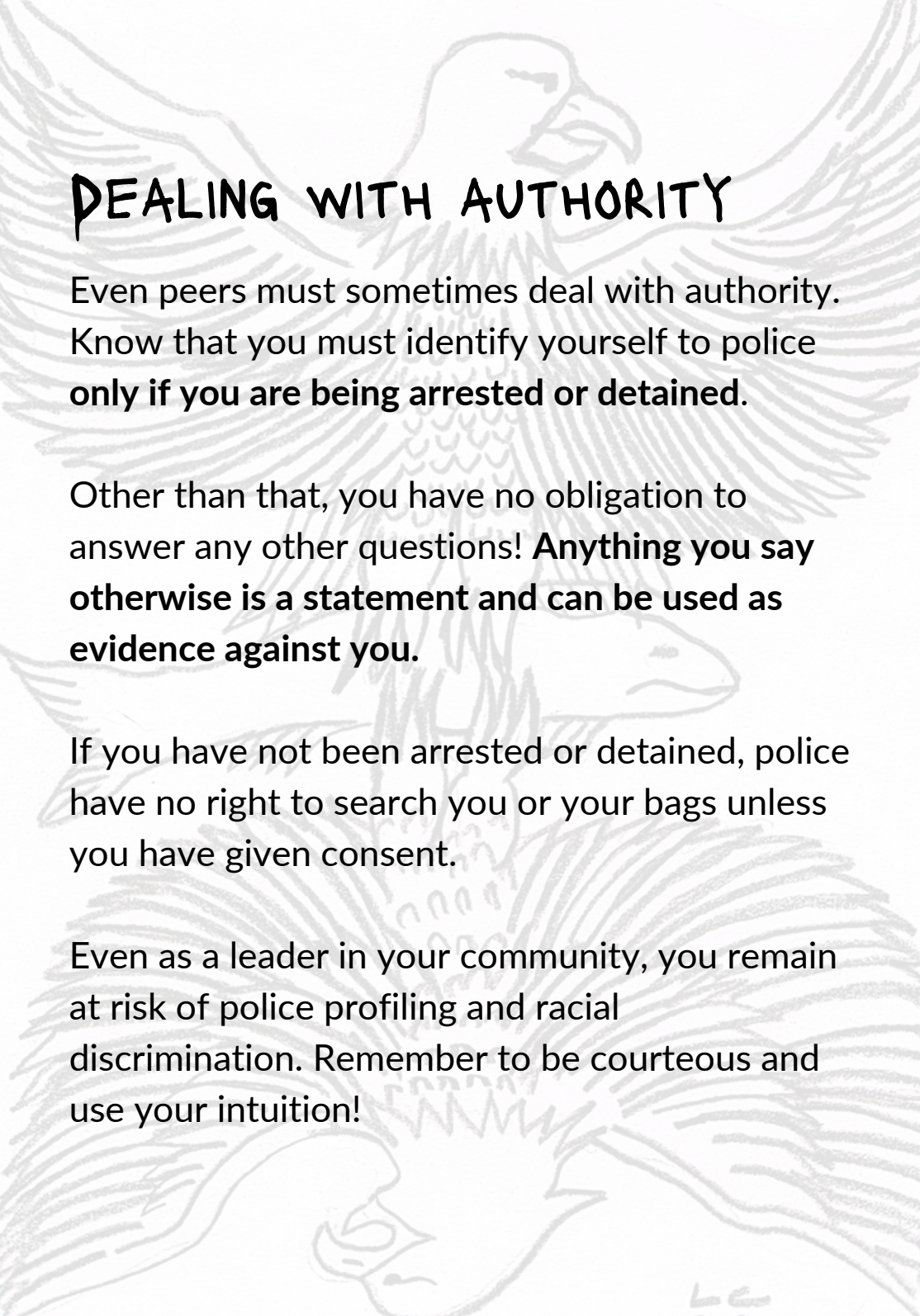


YOU HAVE RIGHTS!

Power can change how people think. You can see it in the eyes of every shelter worker, director, doctor, police officer, and landlord. Not everyone can understand you completely or have your best interests at all times.

Some shelters or charities might seem like prisons. But remember: you don't have to put up with abuse or neglect because you are unhoused, use drugs, or have mental health problems.

Peers advocate for each other in spaces where people are otherwise mistreated or ignored.



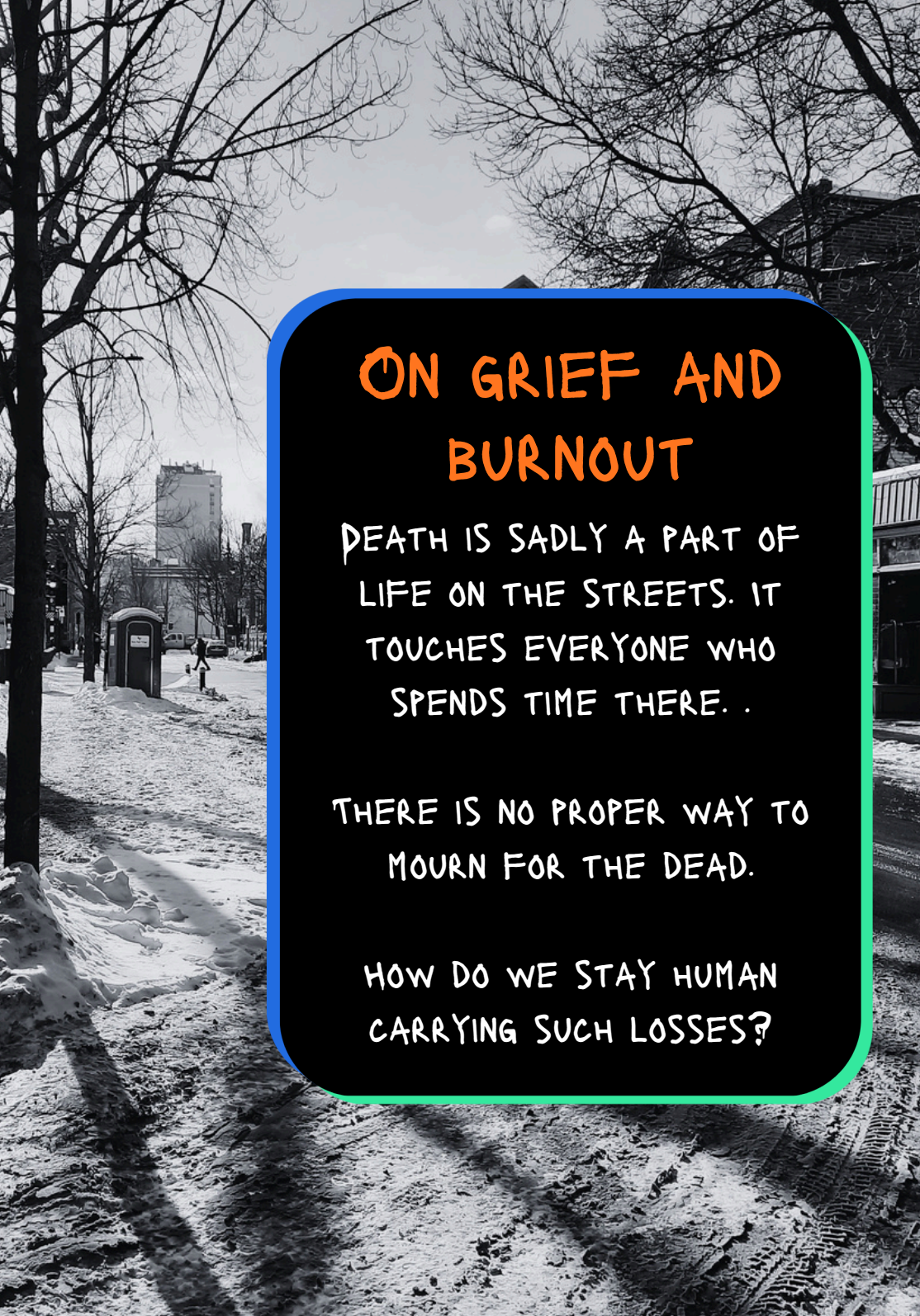
DEALING WITH AUTHORITY

Even peers must sometimes deal with authority. Know that you must identify yourself to police **only if you are being arrested or detained.**

Other than that, you have no obligation to answer any other questions! **Anything you say otherwise is a statement and can be used as evidence against you.**

If you have not been arrested or detained, police have no right to search you or your bags unless you have given consent.

Even as a leader in your community, you remain at risk of police profiling and racial discrimination. Remember to be courteous and use your intuition!



ON GRIEF AND BURNOUT

DEATH IS SADLY A PART OF
LIFE ON THE STREETS. IT
TOUCHES EVERYONE WHO
SPENDS TIME THERE. .

THERE IS NO PROPER WAY TO
MOURN FOR THE DEAD.

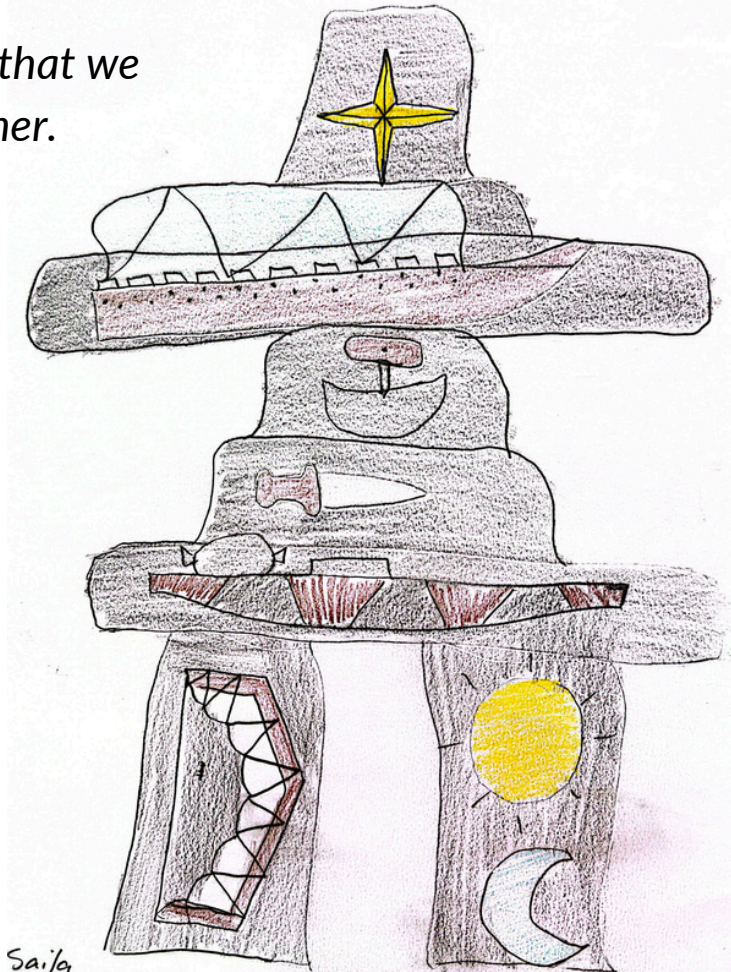
HOW DO WE STAY HUMAN
CARRYING SUCH LOSSES?

OUR POWER IS OUR COMMUNITY

Remember you are not alone. Grief is an emotion everyone can share. Lean on your community if you need to. And if you have the capacity, be that community for someone else.

Sometimes, leaning on each other can help more than leaning on a worker because only peers can truly understand those complicated feelings.

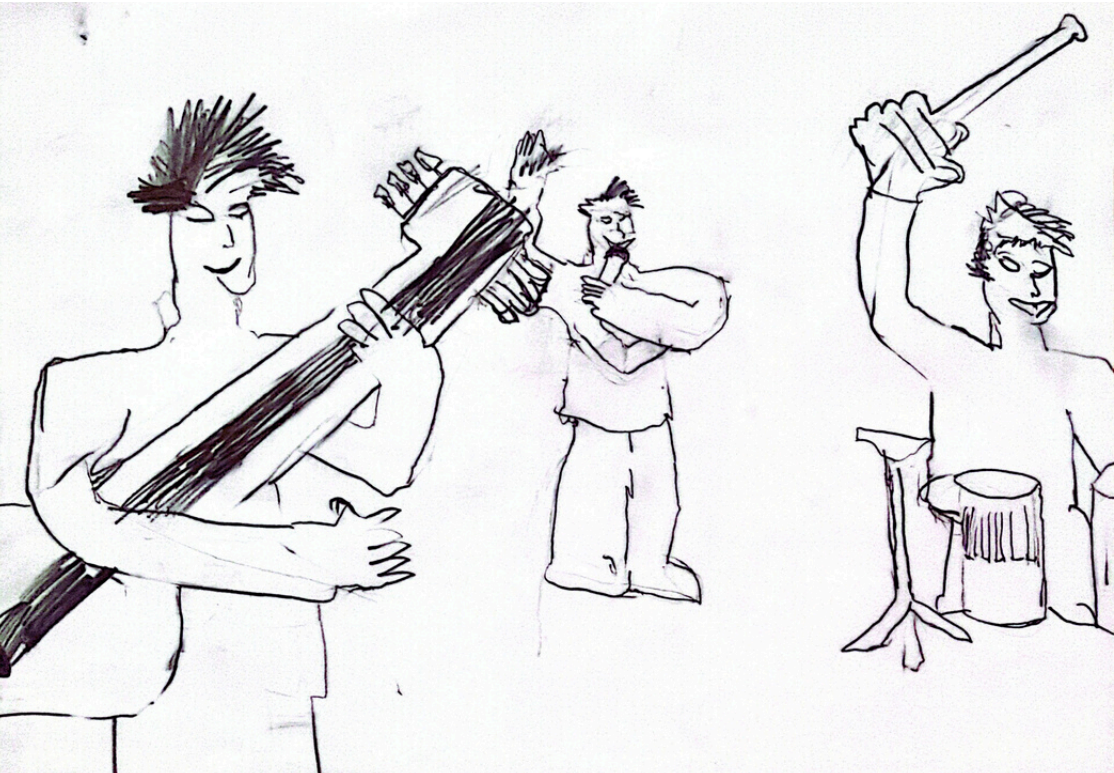
Our power is that we have each other.



NO ONE IS COMING TO SAVE US

Whether from illness or overdose, deaths on the street are, ultimately, deaths of neglect. People have been abandoned. Those who live or have lived on the street understand this clearly.

Governments, programs, shelters, doctors, and workers all come and go. After every death, every tragedy, every crisis - **what remains are our relationships with each other.**

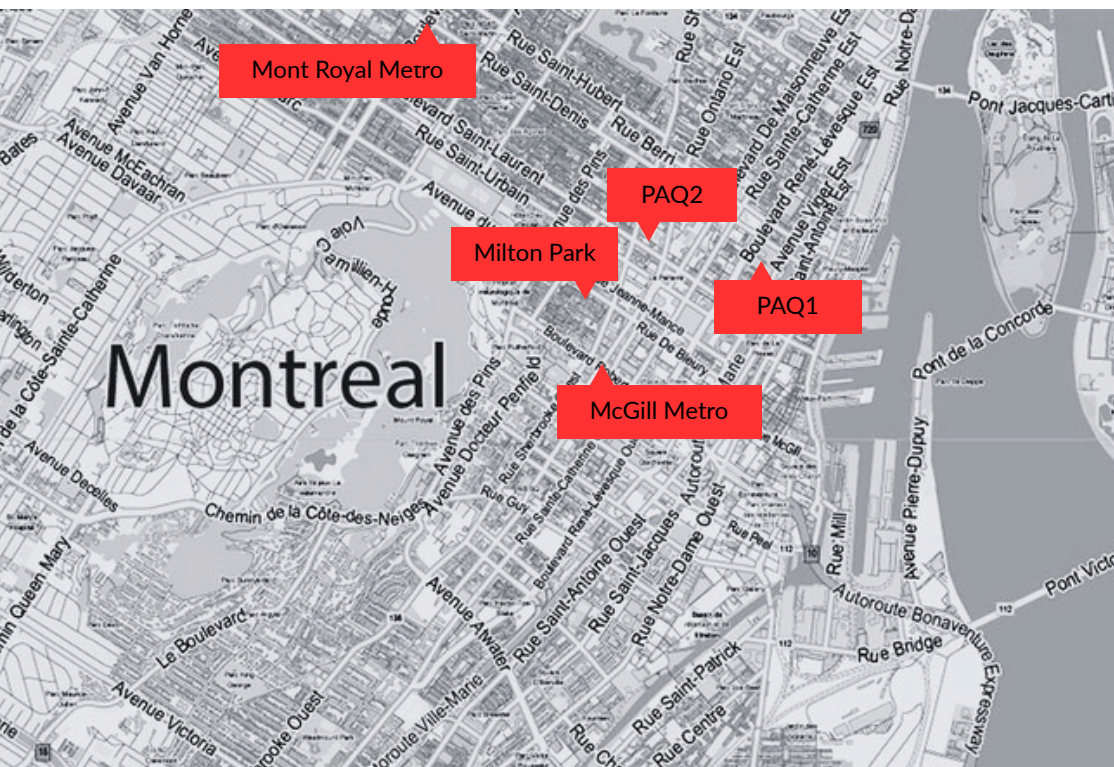


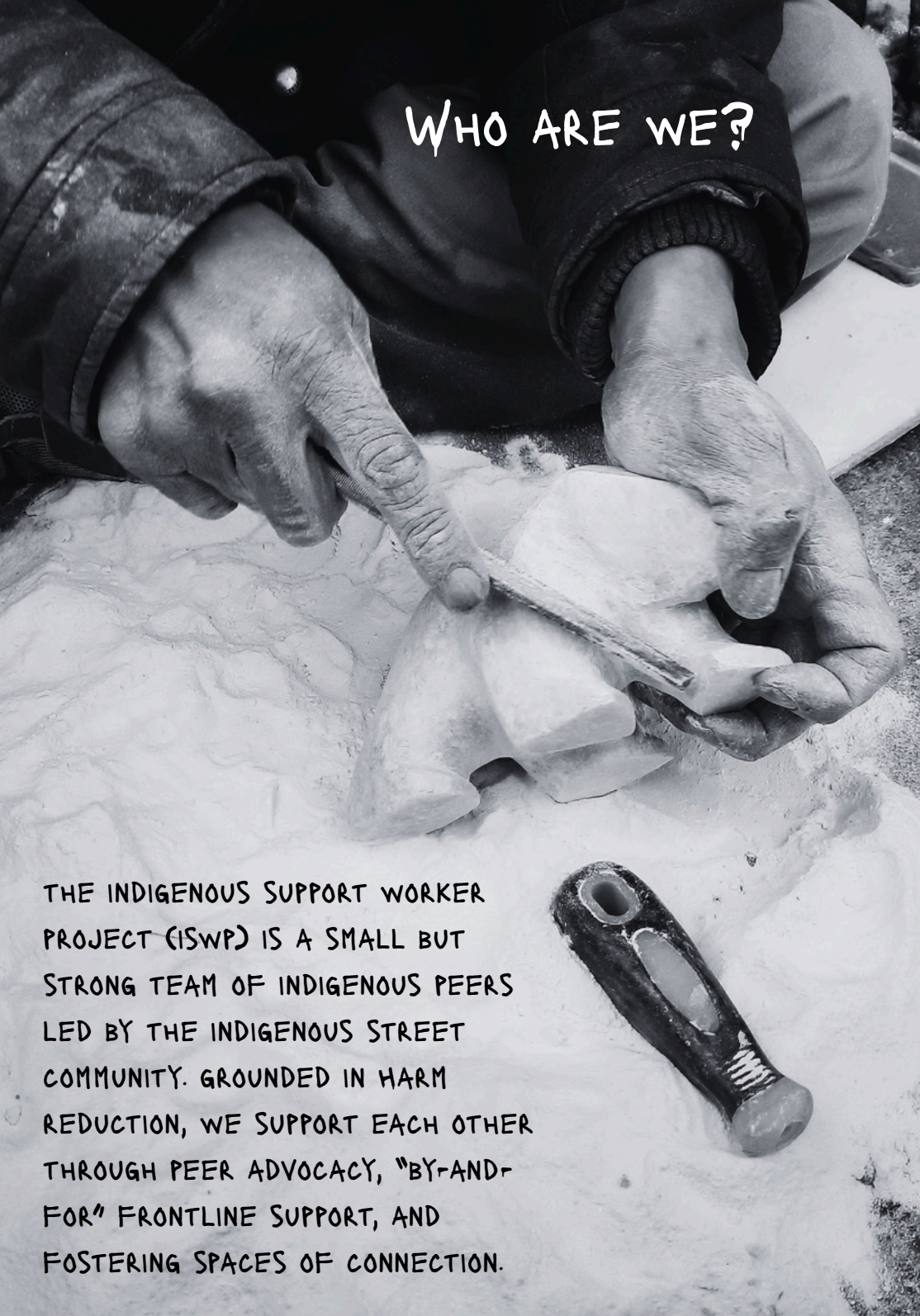
WHERE CAN YOU FIND US?

Our outreach team can be found walking around downtown or the Plateau weeknights on Monday to Thursday, distributing safe consumption material and naloxone.

We also facilitate activities and lunches for our Indigenous community members on weekends behind Mont Royal Metro.

For inquiries, reach out to: [opt.iswp@gmail.com]





WHO ARE WE?

THE INDIGENOUS SUPPORT WORKER PROJECT (ISWP) IS A SMALL BUT STRONG TEAM OF INDIGENOUS PEERS LED BY THE INDIGENOUS STREET COMMUNITY. GROUNDED IN HARM REDUCTION, WE SUPPORT EACH OTHER THROUGH PEER ADVOCACY, "BY-AND-FOR" FRONTLINE SUPPORT, AND FOSTERING SPACES OF CONNECTION.